"CHANCE"

by Joseph Conrad

SYNOPSIS.

THE narrator of the story, with a friend named Marlow, goes off from a vessel to an inn on the bank of the Thames, where they are the guests of Mr. Charles Powell, whom they recognize at once as a seaman retired. Indulging in reminiscences, Powell tells them of the time when, having served his apprenticeship, he passed his examination for second mate and then had a hard time finding a ship. Directed by a friend, he tells how he went to a namesake of his, Powell the shipping master, in Fenchurch street, London, who, taking a fancy to him, was able to get him a berth at once as second officer of the Ferndale. He joins the ship that night in dock, when there is no one on board but the shipkeeper, and he turns into his lonely bunk prepared for anything that may happen, and only knowing that he has shipped for a period "not exceeding two years, to voyage anywhere between latitudes 70 N. and 60 S."

Continued from Part I.

AND I noticed before the match went out that this cabin had originally two bunks, one above the other, but that the lower one had been knocked away quite recently, because the places where the side piece butted on the bulkheads showed bare on the clean paint.

"I wondered if that had been done with the humane and refined intention of fitting by and by a chest of drawers in there. Then I pitched the roll of my bedding into the bunk, but took no trouble to spread it out. I wasn't sleepy now; neither was I tired. And the thought that I was done with the earth for many, many months to come made me feel very quiet and self-contained, as it were. Sailors will understand what I mean."

Marlow nodded. "It is a strictly professional feeling," he commented to us. "But other professions or trades know nothing of it. It is only this calling whose primary appeal lies in the suggestion of restless adventure which holds out that deep sensation to those who embrace it. It is difficult to define, I admit."

"I should call it the peace of the sea," said Mr. Charles Powell in an earnest tone, but looking at us as if he expected to be met by a laugh of derision and were half prepared to salve his reputation for common sense by joining in it. But none of us laughed at Mr. Charles Powell, in whose start in life we had been called to take a part. He was lucky in his audience. We remained serious, some from ignorance, others for an absolutely contrary reason.

"A very good man," said Marlow. "A sailor finds a deep feeling of security in the exercise of his calling, which is so much specialized, not only in the character of its exertions and its duties but in its surroundings. It is unique and it is alone; its activity goes on, as I've said, in solitude and silence. It is certain that, once in the keeping of the sea, you become the inhabitant of a world which is not overpopulated and which holds no rewards. The exacting life of the sea has this advantage over the life of the earth, that its exactions are simple and cannot be evaded or argued away. They are also unchangeable. It is a calling in which there is no room for that diversity of judgment which is the sign of insincerity and errors affecting the pursuit of the arts and trades and professions of the earth. It is an incorruptible calling—that's why it has remained humble.

"You cannot intrude passion into the exercise of seacraft, and as its perfect mastery brings no material recompense in its train it has nothing to fear from the wiles of enviousness, nor can it be made crooked by extraneous consideration tending to personal advantage. All this makes for a peace independent of storms, shoals, fogs and drakness—the peace of the sea which abides in the hearts of its inhabitants who are—or used to be—sailors. Theirs was a moral life. One thought, one aim, one duty, one penalty, bound you to your fellows.

"At sea you dare not say, or even think to yourself, 'Devil take the hindmost.' You've got to be moral, whether you like or not, for this reason—that you have no other welfare but the welfare of your little world, which depends on the faithful discharge of their trust by all the ship's company. It's a pity the earth is not more like a ship sent out on a voyage: it's a pity that it won't be steered or handled and navigated and kept fit to meet the dangers of space.

"There is something pleasing to my imagination in the conception of the succeeding generations, informed and faithful, taking over the duty, with the course to be steered and the responsibility to be borne, from their gray haired predecessors, leaving the deck for a long watch below. It would make better men of her population if the earth were more like a ship that has got to be brought into a port of final discharge safely some day. But she isn't. She merely drifts."

"More like a raft with castaways," suggested our new friend, looking inquisitively at the speaker. The attention to his discourse was agreeable to Marlow.

"No, no," he protested pleasantly. "Let us try to be just. This planet is much more comfortable. It would ill befit us sailors to compare the predicament of our earth to a situation whose enormity of horror and suspense passes the limits of comfortable pity and renders its victims themselves dreadful to our imagination. If the metaphor is to be carried on, I should say that our globe resembles rather a rudderless and unrigged hull launched haphazard upon the deep. Naturally the mob on board—you couldn't call them a ship's company, having no collective trust to keep and answer for, and nothing to do that really matters—go on fighting among themselves for the stores and the accommodation and clambering over each other for precedence, ever since they had learned to balance themselves in space and eternity on their hind legs. And upon my word what else would you have them do, I should like to know?

"Their world makes no call upon their fidelity and their vigilance. Oppressed by the ignorance of their fate, they give their attention to the incertitudes of their thinking souls and the misery of their hungry bodies. The necessity to stave off the pangs of doubt and starvation which can never be appeased for many days together has made them crafty, violent, fearful, overbearing, subtle and unhappy. We who have the luck to be trained young for the different demands of our life are no match for them."

"Gospel truth," said with animation our new acquaintance, whose attention was beginning to flag a little. "I've been sorry to notice myself that whenever a sailor starts in business ashore he's made a fool of in no time."

"You've observed correctly," said Marlow with an encouraging indulgence. "Such is the fact. And, however regrettable in individual instances, it need not be deplored beyond measure, for it bears testimony to the moral excellence of sea training, where guiding principle is doing, not getting. Brought up to do things under the penalties most distasteful to man's spirit and body—the penalty of scorn, with the penalty of death never far in the background—we become honorably mystified in the presence of multiple courses of action whose secret mainspring is the simple little verb 'to get.' Let me tell you, Mr. Bowell, that the same formula will serve for the making of a good seaman as of an upright man. I heard it stated, when a young officer, by an old chief mate who must have been first cousin to Father Neptune himself, if one went by the size of his venerable beard. This appendage stood now and then in the way of his getting employment, but he scorned the notion of shaving it off because he was an upright man as well as a good sailor. He had occasion to rebuke me for the way I went about some heavy job or other, and he ended with the words:—'If you want to be any good at sea you had better remember that there are only two ways of going to work, the right way and the wrong way.'

"You'll observe that this is exactly what the moralists are driving at. But this tranquillizing view of our conduct can be distinguished with some clearness only in a world whose destiny, however humble, is practically, visibly and sensibly dependent upon our action. This can be said of a ship moving night and day in solitude and silence like a guided planet in space and eternity, of which the sea is the only symbol accessible to our imperfect senses and capable of stirring our imagination. But of the earth, toward which we have no duties that would take us out of ourselves, this cannot be said. No wonder, then, that a sort of holy peace steals over the spirit of a seaman at the thought that he has joined a handy ship, where the rule of life is hard but clear, and has done for a time with the earth, which is as unmanageable as Noah's old ark in every respect, but not so well inhabited—not by a long way."

This facile comparison appealed to the fancy of Mr. Charles Powell, ex-sailor, and provoked his self-satisfied hilarity. "Not a happy family by any means. Ha! ha! All the animals kicking and biting—eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

But one's appreciation of somebody else's wit cannot be kept up very long with any satisfaction. Mr. Powell, encouraged by our silence and immobility, harked back with a frown to his own ancient impressions. "What you say about a holy peace stealing upon the spirit, and so on, is all very well. It is a pleasant experience, after kicking about loose ashore for months, to feel an able ship under your feet. I dare say it was to enjoy the sensation that I made my way quickly out on the quarterdeck instead of trying to snatch a sleep in my berth."

Even in the depth of a clouded night alongside a tall warehouse the Ferndale gave him the notion of a powerful ship by the breadth of her beam, the fine sheer of her stout rails fading in the gloom forward, the looming shapes on her deck and the substantial size of whatever he happened to put his hand on in the dark. He hadn't been fifteen minutes on board and already he began to feel as proud as can be of her. This was good for that peace of the spirit we had been talking about. And the stillness of the dock should have helped to keep it up not a little.

There wasn't a footstep or a splash to be heard in all that open space. It was like a blessed dormitory for ships lying all round, one behind another, tucked snugly alongside the low cargo sheds. The faintly towering ranges of their masts seemed to spring up from the ridge of the roofs and he couldn't tell which was afloat and which was ashore. Nothing at all moved. Here and there a glass lamp glimmered in dense obscurity, like a night light in a bedroom. He had never seen anything so perfectly and mysteriously still in his whole life, he assured us.

"I spread my elbows and propped my chin on the rail and ought to have remained as peaceful as though the ship had been lying becalmed a thousand miles from the nearest land," he said. "But I didn't enjoy this holy peace, as you call it, very long"——

"That's because," suggested Marlow with a gentle and persuasive superiority, "the ship was not a thousand miles from the nearest land."

"I couldn't have been more totally removed from it if it had been," protested the other earnestly. He had neither the means nor the slightest inclination to leave her. He had been five and twenty minutes on board, and that was time enough, even in the dark, to get fond of a ship, when one knew that one belonged to her, and to get penetrated by that sense of possession and security which seems to enter into one through the soles of the feet when one steps upon a good honest ship's deck.

But instead of remaining peaceful he became discontented in less than half an hour after joining that ship, he confessed to us. That doesn't say much for that peace which steals, eh? And yet he was done with the shore—quite. There wasn't anybody there to care whether he ever put foot on land again; no one to be pleased at the chance that came in his way or sorry to see him go, except perhaps the good woman of the house, Dalston way, where he used to hang out when in London, and she was mainly vexed to lose a good lodger. She pressed her thin lips together very tight and helped him in his packing with an air of exasperated forbearance.

"I suppose she thought I was a sort of lunatic to go off like this," he commented. "I don't know what my rich widowed aunt might have thought. I didn't suppose she had any very tender feeling for my person, even if she did in the end leave all her money to me. She quarrelled for fifteen years with her only brother, my father, as people on shore do quarrel, you know, about things that have neither right nor wrong to them anyhow. Still, she was the only relative I had in the wide world, and so I'd managed at the cost of some money and worry to make time that afternoon for a dash in a hansom up to her door in one of them dead streets at the further end o' Bayswater. It was her habit to watch me through a long handled double eyeglass all the time I was making my way across her sitting room, trying not to tread upon her silly little dog; and when I sat down at last she would proceed to 'show her interest in me'—you know—start putting questions about myself which made me feel foolish and angry at the same time.

"And when I got restive and offhand in my answers she would raise her double eyeglasses calmly and remark, 'It's extraordinary how you resemble your father.' That used to ruffle my temper more than anything else. Why extraordinary? Who's a man to resemble if not his father, I should like to know? I told her once that I was very glad of it, and she made a sort of a blank face at me. Did she expect, I wonder, that I should apologize for the resemblance. Upon my word, I think you're right; the people ashore, who have nothing but their own fads and fancies to think of, are too much for us. With the poor man dead and gone years and years ago, there she was, trying to get me on her side, as it were, in that miserable quarrel, of which I don't know anything to this day. And, mind, she wasn't an unkind old lady, but I was not sorry to find she was out. She would never have understood any one of my many feelings; she would have been shocked at my excitement and my hurry, and, as likely as not, offended at my not being able to stay with her more than fifteen minutes. I desired the girl who opened the door to tell her mistress that I had called, that I was sorry, that I was going to sea at six next morning and that I would write from Port Elizabeth.

"When I had finished, her face was a picture of distressed stupidity, so I repeated all these things over again as slowly as my patience to be off would allow me to speak. 'You understand—don't you?' I asked her in a kind, soothing tone. 'Oh, yes, sir,' says she. Before I got fairly through the front gate she was after me down the path, her cap streamers flying behind her. 'Please, sir, who'e it I am to say you are going to see?'

"That's the sort of thing you run against at every turn ashore. I went off without answering her and till the old lady got my letter some four months afterward I have no idea what conception she could have formed on the object of my visit and the purport of my message. No doubt she put it all to my resemblance to my poor father. But I had done what I ought to have done in common decency at some personal inconvenience. And the cabby charged me five shillings for that excursion. You know—when a young fellow, just passed, has been hung up looking for a ship a month or six weeks—five shillings is a sum"——

He paused with downcast eyes nodding to himself at some train of retrospective thought having its source in this simple truth of an economical order.

"It's jolly near eighteen years ago," he said, looking up firmly, "so I can tell you I was a perfectly straight young man. I didn't cotton up particularly to the old lady; I saw but little of her; and besides I always felt myself—felt, you understand—on the side of my father in that quarrel they had before I was born. The poor man died when I was a kid just out of petticoats, you know. I wasn't aware that she was thinking of leaving me her money. I was so precious innocent that for all her biggish house and three servants it never occurred to me she had anything to leave. I was incapable of thinking about myself apart from some ship or other. Don't you run away with the idea that I expected to see these five bob come back to me with more of their kind. I did the right thing just for the sake of decency. I had no tie of hope or fear to leave on shore. I was a proper sailor boy at that time, I can tell you. When I paid the two ruffians who carried my chest aboard and had tipped that humbugging bobby I could feel I had squared up my accounts with the land for good and all—and no thanks due to anybody, either."

"I fear," began Marlow, "that in presenting with some few pieces of silver the select band of the earth's delegates who attended you to the edge, so to speak, of the ocean, you imagine to have recognized adequately the auspiciousness of the occasion and the solid merit of your attendants. Such is not the case. With unphilosophical petulance you brand honest 'Ted' and his pal with the name of 'ruffians.' I regret your inconsiderate haste. They may have been lacking in that amenity of manner and in those graces of superficial culture on which the sage (and the sailor, too) would disdain to set too great a store. Their thoughts might have been inelegant and their words few and rude, but their honesty was solid and superlatively excellent. It was in no way the outcome of inherited emotional impulses or misty traditional notions of right and wrong or transcendental reveries of free will and duty and conscience.

"Those two men were virtuous as science would have all mankind virtuous. That is reasonable. They founded their honesty upon the force and plenitude of the rare wisdom that knows itself. No nerve. No muscle. They knew what they lacked, and, what's more, they were faithful to their knowledge. This is immense! Virtue thus established is as dependable as adamant and rises above the temptations of this earth. Learn to venerate its power. To it alone you owed the happy preservation of your luggage and the chance of safety for your precious start in life! Those two miserable night birds grounded their ethics in the mighty law of inexorable necessity, which rules us all. This is genius. Harnessing lightning to a brougham is nothing to it. Do not let us mince matters. They were great!

"But I confess that my admiration for the constable is by no means so pronounced. That officer appears to me considerably less estimable just in this that he imagined himself master of his fate; whereas his conduct never soared above the momentary instincts of expediency and prudence. There's no foundation in science or philosophy for the maxim that 'honesty is the best policy.' Though its steady and official application enabled him to treat his betters with injurious insolence and undeserved contumely I am not to be dazzled by the vain pomp and privileges of authority in high places, and I cannot but deplore that a familiar sort of cowardice induced you to bestow a coin which would have been more worthily employed in being flung into the dock."

Marlow ceased. And Mr. Charles Powell hastily closed his mouth, which had been dropping open wider and wider in the effort of his innocence to absorb and make his own by the way of the gullet both the sound and the sense. For such is the primitive instinct of humanity, descended from its obscure childhood and surviving to this day in many veridic idioms of common speech, as for instance "tasting the eloquence" or "drinking in the words." He then closed his jaw abruptly, swallowed visibly, and dashing his open palm upon the table, exclaimed aloud in the sincerity of his wonder:—"My identical sentiments to a T about that bobby! Jolly sight better for the half crown to have gone plop into the old dock. I remember feeling that at the very time."

He gazed in silence till his ruddy face, clouded by the throes of intellectual mistrust, clearing up, at last assumed a jovial and sympathetic openness.

"There Wasn't Anybody There to Care Whether He Ever Put Foot on Land Again."

"Get along with you! What are you trying to get at?" he apostrophized Marlow suddenly in slangy tones and with a knowing wink.

This boisterous interpellation and this wink Marlow acknowledged sufficiently by a non-committal smile.

That an excellent understanding should have established itself between our old friend and our new acquaintance was remarkable enough, for they were exactly dissimilar; one individuality projecting itself in length and the other in breadth, which is already sufficient ground for irreconcilable differences. Marlow, who was lanky, loose, quietly composed in varied shades of brown robbed of every vestige of gloss, had a narrow, veiled glance, the neutral bearing and the secret irritability which go together with a predisposition to congestion of the liver. The other, compact, broad and sturdy of limb, seemed extremely full of sound organs functioning vigorously all the time in order to keep up the brilliance of his coloring, the tight curl of his coal black hair and the lustre of his eyes, which asserted themselves roundly in a florid, kindly face.

Between two such organisms one would not have expected to find the slightest temperamental accord. But I have observed that profane men living in ships, like the holy men gathered together in monasteries, develop traits of profound resemblance. This must be because the service of the sea and the service of a temple are both detached from the vanities and errors of a world which follows no severe rule. The men of the sea understand each other very well in their views of earthly things, for simplicity is a good counsellor and isolation not a bad educator. A turn of mind composed of innocence and scepticism is common to them all, with the addition of an unexpected insight into motives—as of disinterested lookers on at a game.

"You can't get very far with that sort of chaff," pronounced Mr. Charles Powell sagely. "I had a good ship under my feet and a clear eighteen pence in my pocket, what looked like a fair start, and I was discontented."

"It is a state common to all humanity," Marlow consoled him. "It has been even extolled as divine by some wise men—after a good dinner I should say—when the invigorated human frame harbors a babbling and unchastened spirit. Haven't you ever heard of divine discontent, Mr. Powell? Things divine are full of mystery. Certainly the sum of eighteen pence may oppress a sailor who has just joined his ship and has no use for wealth with the sense of vast and superfluous opulence—an experience, by the by, denied to a Rothschild or a Vanderbilt, who live in terms of money. But this sort of discomfort apart, I don't see what you had to complain of. Was your discontent divine, Mr. Powell? Or was it only that—speaking without offence—you were at the time an exceptionally cantankerous young cub with a swelled head?"

Mr. Charles Powell took no offence. He shook his head slightly, looking at the bowl of his pipe.

"Nothing had happened much to swell my head," he said, "in this piece of luck. It hadn't as much merit as getting a winning ticket in a raffle. There one puts in something of one's own—a shilling or half a crown, as the case may be. But I had done nothing. I hadn't put in a penny-worth of my own."

"Except some considerable cheek," suggested Marlow in an encouraging tone. "That at any rate, you'd done."

"I was pretty nigh desperate," pointed out Mr. Charles Powell modestly. "That's nothing to be proud of."

Marlow addressed us:—"Look at him! He wanted to get on and at the same time to have every right to be proud of it. If you don't call that being exacting!"

We all looked at Mr. Powell without ceremony, as though he were a lay figure used for demonstration. He smoked on sturdily. A not very respectable voice advanced with a half laugh:—

"It's a sort of morality, don't you know."

But Marlow was too subtle to accept this rude attempt at generalization. He objected to it in the first instance as too vague altogether. "Whereas," he argued, mockingly, "when I say exacting I define the precise symptom of this particular form of common disease. This disease is egotism, which, in its acute form, attacks the male young of the human species. Women used to be free from it before they—but let that be. They've lost that superiority. His discontent might have been moral or not, but in any case it was unhealthy."

Except for the helpless imbecility of expression, which lends a certain pathos to the stoicism of a dummy figure, Mr. Powell sat among us as if his breast were indeed made of insensible wood. But I could not forget that the man had some sort of inside capable, without doubt, of taking offence at Marlow's peculiar kind of badinage. For myself, I must confess to some liking for this game of digging under the emotions of trivial existences, wherein the rich significance of things is often found—as a mine of diamonds may be discovered in commonplace surroundings. It was in a spirit of conciliation that I ventured to say:—

"It was respectable."

Mr. Powell, without moving his head, acknowledged my interference by looking at me out of the corners of his eyes—if such round eyes may be said to have corners. Yet in him, this peculiarity was far from being owlish and went well with the resolute aspect of his face. He was round eyed, as some frank, naïve boys are. You could perceive that there were no corners in his character and no crooked thoughts in his head. And, with all that, he was not unintelligent. He must have understood my intention. Taking the pipe out of his mouth, he remarked in an undertone for me only:—"Oh, I don't mind what he says."

"You understand each other pretty well," I observed.

"I know his sort. It isn't a bad sort," he said, going to the window to look at his cutter still riding to the flood. "Always chasing some notion or other round and round his head for the fun of the thing."

"Keeps them in good condition," I said.

"Lively enough, I dare say," he admitted.

"Would you like better a man who let his notions lie curled up—that is, if he has any?"

"That I wouldn't," answered our very new acquaintance. Clearly he was not difficult to get on with. "I like him well enough," he continued, "though it isn't easy to make him out. He seems to be up to a thing or two. What is he doing?"

I informed him that our friend Marlow had retired from the sea in a sort of half-hearted fashion some years ago.

Mr. Powell's comment was, "Fancied had enough of it?"

"Fancied's the very word to use in this connection," I observed, remembering the subtly provisional character of Marlow's long sojourn among us. From year to year he dwelt on land as a bird rests on the branch of a tree, so tense, as it were, with the power of brusque flight into its true element that it is incomprehensible why it should sit still minute after minute. The sea is the sailor's true element, and Marlow, lingering on shore, was to me an object of incredulous commiseration, like a bird which secretly should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying.

We were all on our feet in the room then and Marlow, brown and deliberate, approached the window, too.

"What was the name of your chance again?" he asked.

Mr. Powell stared for a moment. "Ferndale; the Ferndale, a Liverpool owned ship. Composite built."

"Ferndale," repeated Marlow thoughtfully; "Ferndale."

"Know her?"

"Our friend," I said, "knows something of every ship. He seems to have gone about the seas prying into things considerably."

Marlow smiled. "I've seen her at least once."

"The finest sea boat ever launched," declared Mr. Powell sturdily, "without exception."

"She looked as if she were a very comfortable ship," assented Marlow, "uncommonly comfortable. Not very fast, though."

"She was fast enough for any reasonable man when I was in her," growled Mr. Powell, with his back to us.

"Any ship is that for a reasonable man," generalized Marlow in a conciliatory tone. "A sailor isn't a globe trotter."

"No," muttered Mr. Powell.

"Time's nothing to him," advanced Marlow.

"I don't suppose it's much," said Mr. Powell. "All the same, a quick passage is a feather in a man's cap."

"True. But that ornament is for the use of the master only. And, by the bye, what was his name?"

"The master of the Ferndale? Anthony, Captain Anthony."

"Just so. Quite right," approved Marlow thoughtfully.

Our new acquaintance looked over his shoulder. "What do you mean? Why is it more right than if it had been Smith?"

"He has known him probably," I explained. "Marlow, here, appears to know something of every soul that ever went afloat in a sailor's body."

Mr. Powell seemed wonderfuly amenable to verbal suggestions, for, looking again out of the window, he muttered:—"He was a good soul."

This clearly referred to Captain Anthony of the Ferndale. Marlow addressed his protest to me:—

"I did not know him. I really didn't. He was a good soul. That's nothing very much out of the way—is it? And I didn't even know that much of him. All I knew of him was an accident called Fyne."

At this Mr. Powell, who evidently could be rebellious, too, turned his back squarely on the window.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "An—accident—called—Fyne," he repeated, separating the words with disgust.

Marlow was not disconcerted. "I don't mean accident in the sense of a mishap. Not in the least. Fyne was a good little man in the Civil Service. By accident I mean that which happens blindly and without intelligent design. That's generally the way a brother-in-law happens into a man's life."

Marlow's tone being apologetic, and our new acquaintance having again turned to the window, I took it upon myself to say:—"You are justified. There is very little intelligent design in the majority of marriages, but they are none the worse for that. Intelligence leads people astray as much as passion sometimes. I know you are not a cynic."

Marlow smiled his retrospective smile, which was kind as though he bore no grudge against people he used to know. "Little Fyne's marriage was quite successful. There was no design at all in it. Fyne, you must know, was an enthusiastic pedestrian. He spent his holidays tramping all over our native land. His tastes were simple. He put infinite conviction and perseverance into his holidays. At the proper season you would meet in the fields Fyne, a serious faced, broad chested little man, with a shabby knapsack on his back, making for some church steeple. He had a horror of roads. He wrote once a little book called 'The Tramp's Itinerary' and was recognized as an authority on the footpaths of England. So one year, in his favorite over-the-fields, backway fashion, he got into a pretty Surrey village, where he met Miss Anthony. Pure accident, you see. They came to an understanding, across some stile, likely. Little Fyne held some very solemn views as to the destiny of women on this earth, the nature of our sublunary love, the obligations of this transient life and so on. He probably disclosed them to his future wife. Miss Anthony's views of life were very decided, but not so solemn. I don't know the story of their wooing; I imagine it was carried on clandestinely and, I am certain, with portentous gravity. At the back of copses, behind hedges."

"Why was it carried on clandestinely?" I inquired.

"Because of the father, a savage sentimentalist, who had his own decided views of a daughter's duties. He was a terror, and the only evidence of imaginative faculty about Fyne was his pride in his wife's parentage. It stimulated his ingenuity, too. Difficult—isn't it—to introduce one's wife's maiden name into general conversation. But my simple Fyne made use of Captain Anthony for that purpose, or else I would never even have heard of him. 'My wife's sailor brother' was the phrase. He trotted out the sailor brother in a pretty wide range of subjects—Indian and colonial affairs, matters of trade, talk of travels, of seaside holidays and so on. Once I remember 'my wife's sailor brother, Captain Anthony,' being produced for glory in connection with nothing more recondite than a sunset. And little Fyne never failed to add:—'The son of Carleon Anthony, the poet, you know.' He used to lower his voice for that statement and people were impressed, or pretended to be.

"The late Carleon Anthony was a poet of a past age. He sang in his time of the domestic and social amenities of civilization with a most felicitous versification, his object being, in his own words, 'to glorify the result of six thousand years' evolution toward the refinement of thoughts and sentiments.' Why he fixed the term at six thousand years I don't know. His poems were like sentimental novels in verse of a quite superior quality. It was like being taken out for a delightful country drive by a charming lady in a pony carriage. But in his domestic life he showed traces of the primitive cave dweller.

"He was a massive, implacable man with a rugged face, arbitrary and exacting with his dependents, though he could be marvellously suave in his manner to admiring strangers. These contrasted displays must have been particularly exasperating to his long suffering family. After his second wife's death his boy, whom he persisted, by a mere whim, in educating at home, ran away in conventional style, and as if disgusted with the amenities of civilization threw himself, figurately speaking, into the sea. The daughter (the elder of the two children), either from compassion or because women are naturally more enduring, remained in bondage to the poet for several years, till she, too, seized a chance to escape by throwing herself into the arms, the muscular arms, of the pedestrian Fyne. This was either great luck or great sagacity. A civil servant is the last human being in the world I should imagine to preserve those traits of the cave dweller from which she was fleeing. Her father would never consent to see her afterward. Such unforgiving selfishness is difficult to understand, unless as a perverse sort of refinement. There were also doubts as to his complete sanity for some considerable time before he died."

Most of the above I elicited from Marlow, for all I knew of Carleon Anthony was his unexciting but fascinating verse. Marlow assured me that the Fyne marriage was perfectly successful and even happy, in an earnest, unplayful fashion, being blessed besides by three healthy, smiling, self-reliant children—all girls. They were all pedestrians, too. Even the youngest, who was only just over two years old, would wander off quite half a mile if not restrained. Mrs. Fyne had a ruddy, out-of-door complexion, and wore blouses with a starched front like a man's shirt, a stand-up collar and a long necktie. Marlow had made their acquaintance one summer in the country, where they were accustomed to take a cottage for the holidays.

At this point we were interrupted by Mr. Powell, who declared that he must leave us. The tide was on the turn, he announced, coming away from the window abruptly, and he wanted to be on board his cutter before she swung. He was gone in a moment, unceremoniously, but giving us no offence and leaving behind an impression as though we had known him for a long time. The ingenious way he told us of his start in life had something to do with putting him on that footing with our band. And yet none of us gave a thought to seeing him again; no one except Marlow, who expressed a confident hope of coming across him before long.

"He cruises about the mouth of the river all the summer. He will be easy to find any week end," he remarked, ringing the bell so that we might settle with the waiter.

Later on I asked him why he wished to cultivate this chance acquaintance. He confessed, apologetically, that it was the commonest sort of curiosity. I flatter myself that I understand all sorts of curiosity—curiosity about daily facts, about daily things, about daily men. It is the most respectable faculty of the human mind; in fact, I cannot conceive of the uses of an incurious mind. It would be like a chamber perpetually locked up. But in this particular case I opined that there appeared but little to find out. Mr. Powell seemed to have given us already a complete insight into his personality, such as it was; a personality capable of perception and with a feeling for the vagaries of fate, but essentially simple in itself.

Marlow agreed, but explained that his curiosity was not excited by Mr. Powell exclusively. It originated a good way further back in the fact of his accidental acquaintance with the Fynes, in the country. This chance meeting with a man who had sailed with Captain Anthony had revived it.

(To Be Continued.)